



JOINT MEDIA RELEASE – MAY 24, 2005

GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO AFFIRM ITS COMMITMENT TO PROTECT WATER IN ONTARIO

NEWMARKET, Ontario - As the people of Walkerton and the province mark the fifth anniversary of the tainted drinking water tragedy in that community, a broad coalition of organizations said the absence of clear movement on source water protection legislation or appropriate funding in the budget sends a troubling signal that the government's commitment to protect Ontario's drinking water has significantly diminished.

"Nothing is more important than protecting the health of the people in Ontario," said Peter Krause, Chair of Conservation Ontario (CO). "And yet, the government seems to be stalled in dealing with this critical issue."

In a letter to Premier Dalton McGuinty, coalition members questioned the delay in introducing the *Drinking Water Source Protection Act*. "This legislation and accompanying regulations will provide the important framework needed to develop action plans for protecting water in Ontario," said Tod Wright, Senior Provincial Director for Ontario of Ducks Unlimited Canada.

The government provided conservation authorities and municipalities with approximately \$12 million last November to begin initial technical work. "However, there can be no real movement on local initiatives without the legislation and regulations," said Paul Muldoon, Executive Director and Counsel with the Canadian Environmental Law Association.

Authors of the letter include some of the members of the government-established Source Protection Implementation Committee. That committee had a broad cross section of water managers, users and advocates including public health, agriculture, conservation authorities, municipalities, environment, private industry and the legal community. Established in 2003 to provide advice on how to ensure safe and sufficient water supplies for the people Ontario, the committee's final report was presented last fall.

Saying that "there must never be another Walkerton tragedy," the letter calls on the government to proclaim drinking water source protection legislation before the end of the year. "Until this critical

first barrier (source water protection) is put in place, drinking water supplies remain vulnerable and the health of Ontario residents remains at risk.”

The community of Walkerton is marking the tragic event in May 2000 at the end of this month by hosting a day-long symposium featuring local speakers and public health experts. The session will look at what has been done, since then, to ensure this does not happen again.

- 30 -

A copy of the letter to Premier McGuinty is also available on Conservation Ontario's website:
www.conservation-ontario.on.ca

For More Information:

Richard Hunter, Conservation Ontario, 905-895-0716 ext 224; Cell: 905-717-0617
dhunter@conservation-ontario.on.ca

Jim Anderson, Ducks Unlimited Canada, 905-852-2827, Cell: 905-717-5825
js_anderson@ducks.ca

Theresa McClenaghan, Canadian Environmental Law Association, 416-960-2284 ext 218;
Cell: 519-755-7579 mcclenaghan@execulink.com

Jane Lewington, Marketing & Communications, Conservation Ontario, Cell: 905-717-0301
jl Lewington@conservation-ontario.on.ca